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Reserved seats for women in Pakistan: Reinforcement of patriarchy and powerlessness (2002–2018)

Abeeda Qureshi^{a,*}, Sara Ahmad^b^a Department of Political Science at Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore, Pakistan^b Department of Politics and International Relations, Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent to which a significant increase in the number of women in Pakistan translated into substantive representation for women. Based on elite interviews, this study finds a positive correlation between women's descriptive and substantive representation in women parliamentarians' proactive participation, regardless of their party affiliation, resulting in the passage of eleven bills against the gender discriminatory practices in Pakistan. The affirmative action, however, has failed to bring any positive changes in the gender essentialist perception of women in politics. The study attributes the widening gender disparity in constituency politics to the authoritarian, elitist and dynastic political culture in Pakistan and concludes by highlighting the role of mothers in challenging the gender essentialist stereotypes in homes, and the importance of 'sensitizing men and engaging them in a dialogue' to redefine the narrative around women. Equally important, however, is the restructuring of political parties along democratic lines by promoting meritocracy and transparency.

1. Introduction

Women have always been under-represented in legislative bodies in developed, as well as developing, countries (Childs & Krook, 2008). The patriarchal and, in many cases, misogynistic tendencies embedded in religio-cultural traditions (Bhattacharya, 2014; Rasul, 2014) are cited as primary reasons for women's marginalization and exclusion from politics. To reduce disparity in political representation and to push forward the agenda for women's empowerment, affirmative actions, such as reserved seats for women in parliament or party quotas, were supported in many countries, e.g. Germany, Italy, Spain, Mexico, Rwanda and Australia (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The aim was to ensure women's ascendancy to the corridors of power that otherwise would not have been possible considering the socio-political structures that discriminated against them (Asia Report, 2015; Wangnerud, 2009; Markham, 2012; O'Neil & Domingo, 2015; Phillips, 1998). These affirmative actions were considered to be a 'game changer' (Dutoya, 2013), as it was envisioned that the presence of women in the law-making bodies would help to address the women's issues that had so far been neglected.

The supporters of this notion, in line with the theorists of the Politics of Presence, argue that women themselves are in the best position to

represent women's interests (Phillips, 1998); and hence establishes a link between sex and representation (Childs, 2006). Dahlerup (1988) suggested that a significant change in the political culture is expected if women attain a critical mass of 30 % in the decision-making bodies (Childs, 2004; Kurebwa, 2017), who as Pitkin (1967) highlights, would not only stand as women, but would also act for women (Pitkin, 1967). Following the rationale, the affirmative actions or gender quotas received endorsement by the United Nations. Goal 3 of the UN Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2010, promotes gender equality and acknowledges the importance of affirmative actions or quotas in raising women's political power. These measures are considered "effective in 'fast-tracking' women's political representation" (European Parliament, 1997; McCann, 2013).

The theorists of the politics of ideas, however, contest the assumption that there is a relationship between the percentage of women elected to political office and the passage of legislations beneficial to women as a group (Mansbridge, 2003; Kaurebwa, 2017) and argue that the 'critical actors' are more important than the 'critical mass' (Childs & Krook, 2009; Saward, 2006; Saward, 2009).

This is true in the case of democracy, it is argued, which is widely understood to represent particular policies and ideas regardless of the sex of the representative who is considered accountable (Phillips, 1998)

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: abeedaqureshi@hotmail.com (A. Qureshi).

and whose interests they promise to represent. Thus, they do not only raise serious concerns and questions regarding how the quotas are considered to contribute to the political empowerment of women, but they also consider that such affirmative actions are a violation of the principles of liberal democracy, and are 'discriminatory and interventionist' towards other groups, and at odds with the precept of equality between the sexes which has been enshrined either in their constitution or in national legislation (McCann, 2013). This argument served as the basis for the rejection of quotas for women by many European countries, such as Italy and the United Kingdom (European Parliament, 1997).

In the context of Pakistan, however, the presence of women in reserved seats is viewed positively (Dutoya, 2013; Jabeen & Awan, 2017; Mehboob, 2016; Rai, 2005; Sterken & Zia, 2015; Surani, 2016), as the studies on the subject found a positive correlation between the presence of women in parliament and the passing of specific legislation for women. In Pakistan, politics is considered to be a masculine field, leading to an indefensible scale of the gender gap in political representation.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2021), Pakistan's position is 153 out of 156 countries on four sub-indexes of gender parity, such as 152 in economic participation and opportunity, 153 in health and survival, 144 in educational attainment, and 98 in political empowerment. On the political representation scale, however, the better position of women elucidates the presence of reserved seats for women in parliament (Election Act, 2002), constituting 17.5 % of women legislators in the National Assembly and 16 % of the total women in the senate (Senate of Pakistan, 2020).

The breakdown of the data gives us a true picture of women's representation in Pakistan, which is negligible if we do not take into account the women parliamentarians in reserved seats. Nevertheless, despite the presence of a substantive number of women parliamentarians, the steady decline in the number of women in general seats raises a number of questions regarding the usefulness of the affirmative measures – an increase in the number of reserved seats for women and an allocation of a 5 % quota for women in the political parties in general elections.

This study explores the role of women parliamentarians selected in reserved seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan in uplifting the socio-political and economic status of women in Pakistan by ensuring sufficient safeguards for them in the constitution. The findings would help in determining whether the role played by women parliamentarians in the legislative assemblies is substantive, or merely descriptive. The research further intends to analyse the extent to which the affirmative actions have helped to create a conducive environment for women's ascendancy to the corridors of power through constituency politics by challenging the gender discriminatory practices in the political parties. Last but not least, the article explores the best practices needed to ensure a fair representation of women in politics. For this purpose, the following section explores the literature that illuminates the practices employed in different countries to achieve a substantive representation of women in politics, followed by an overview of affirmative actions taken in Pakistan in this regard. The subsequent section explains the methodological foundations used to ascertain the answer. The next part attempts to analyse the legislative activities of women parliamentarians to determine the authenticity of their representative claims. The discussion in the next section, based on elite interviews, highlights the challenges in creating a conducive environment for women in active participation in politics. In the discussion and analysis, the sensitization of menfolk towards women, and their changing role in society, are emphasized, apart from the need for a democratic shift in the way the political parties are being run.

2. Reserved seats for women: an overview

As discussed in the preceding section, in response to the gender discriminatory socio-cultural and religious practices and

institutionalized inequalities (Kusumadewi, 2019), the gender quotas were introduced in many countries to ensure women's participation in politics and at higher level administrative positions (Kusumadewi, 2019; McCann, 2013). The affirmative action led to a significant increase in the percentage of women in the politics, though in many countries, it is still far from the desired percentage, e.g., 30 % (Bukari et al., 2017; Kusumadewi, 2019; McCann, 2013; Russell & O'Connell, 2003).

In Europe, for example, France, Sweden, Germany and Norway have introduced affirmative actions to ensure gender equality both in the workforce and in legislative assemblies. Likewise, many Asian countries, e.g., Indonesia, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and China have adopted the quotas system, which could be the reason behind the higher percentage of women in the legislative assemblies of these countries. For example, women constitute 42 % of the legislative assembly of Taiwan (Huang, 2015; Tan, 2016). Japan and Myanmar, however, do not have such quotas and this could be the reason that in Japan, women constitute only 10 % of the lower house of their parliament (Liu, 2021).

In South Asia, when it comes to political representation, Nepal leads with 32.7 % women in parliament, followed by Bangladesh at 20.6 %, Pakistan 20.2 %, Bhutan 14.9 %, India 12.6 %, and Sri Lanka 5.3 % (12 in a house of 225 in a unicameral legislature), and Maldives at 4.7 % (Dawn, 2020; Kamdar, 2020). The reason for Nepal being ahead is that Nepal has reserved 33 % of seats for women in all of its state institutions, including legislature (Haque, 2021). The lower numbers of women in the parliaments of Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka is attributed to the fact that these countries rejected the quota system for being undemocratic. Thus, the better representation of women in the legislative assemblies in South Asia is also linked to the introduction of reserved seats in their legislatures. Interestingly, in three major south Asian countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, women have assumed the highest political office in stark contrast to the overall position and the status of women in politics; however, the women who have assumed the highest office owe their ascendancy to power to the male members of their families, who earlier had served in top positions in the country (Anjum, 2017; Khan, 2019; Venkateswari, 2021). However in Pakistan, women's activism was primarily led by urban and elite class, educated women who had played a very positive role in the passage of women-friendly laws (Awan, 2016). For example, in 1948, the Shariat Act, which replaced the customary law with an Islamic Law and acknowledged women's rights to property, including agricultural land, was the result of 500 women activists who demonstrated in front of the legislative assembly. The women activists remained active throughout the history of Pakistan and became a voice of resistance against the rigid orthodoxy. The introduction of reserved seats for women in the first Constitution of Pakistan in 1956, and the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (MFLO) in 1961 to uplift the socio-economic condition of women (Awan, 2016), was an outcome of women's activism in Pakistan.

The history of women's reserved seats in the sub-continent, however, can be traced back to the time of British India. Under the Government of India Act 1935, a 3 % quota was reserved for women in the Council of State and Federal Assembly. The 3 % quota for women was retained in the first constituent Assembly of Pakistan that lasted from 1947 to 1954, as no elections were held during this period due to political instability in the country. Two women, Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz and Begum Shaista Ikramullah (2 females from a house of 30) became the first women parliamentarians in Pakistan. The provision for reserved seats for women was retained in the first constitution of Pakistan in 1956, with an increase in number of seats to 10 in a unicameral legislature. The significant features of this constitution were a direct election of women on reserved seats, from special territorial constituencies on the principle of female suffrage and the dual voting rights given to them i.e., both on general and reserved seats. (Aurat Foundation, 2012). The dream, however, could not be materialized, as elections were not held under the 1956 Constitution after it was abrogated with the proclamation of the first Martial Law on October 8, 1958, by military dictator General Muhammad Ayub Khan.

General Muhammad Ayub Khan came up with Pakistan's second constitution in 1962. In the new constitution, six seats (three from each province) were allocated for women in a house of 156. Unlike the 1956 constitution, the method of election was indirect, through an electoral college, comprised of 'Basic Democrats'. These women, nominated by their political parties were chosen by the provincial assemblies who themselves were elected by the 'basic democrats' of their respective province. This change in the election procedure was criticized for leaving women at the mercy of the party leadership (Hussain, 2011; Shami, 2009). In 1969, General Yahya Khan replaced General Muhammad Ayub Khan by declaring another Martial Law in Pakistan. General Yahya Khan abrogated the 1962 constitution and replaced it with the Legal Framework Order (LFO). The new constitutional arrangement sustained the quota for women and allocated 13 reserved seats for women in a house of 313 through indirect elections held by members of the National Assembly. The next election was held on 7 December 1970, but the assembly could not convene its session due to the secessionist movement in East Pakistan that resulted in the separation of Pakistan's East wing into Bangladesh. The new constituent assembly, under the leadership of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, presented the 1973 Constitution. The 1973 Constitution consisted of two houses of parliament, whilst the previous constitutions consisted of single chamber. The reserved seats were retained in the new constitution and 10 seats were reserved for women in the National Assembly of Pakistan. The method for selecting women was based on indirect elections, held by the National Assembly (lower house of the parliament) (Aurat Foundation, 2012; Saigol, 2016). It was, however, made clear that this affirmative action was valid, only for the next two general elections, or ten years. The reserved seats were retained in the 1977 general elections (Fig. 1).

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government was overthrown by General Zia ul Haq, amidst massive protests across the country against rigging in the general election in 1977. General Zia ul Haq imposed martial law, suspended the 1973 Constitution and banned political activities in the country. During the revival of the constitution order, in 1985, introduced by the martial law regime of Zia ul Haq, the reserved seats for women were increased from 10 to 20 and were applicable for the next three general elections, or 10 years. The reserved seats for women were retained in the 1988 and 1990 general elections under a democratic set up. However, none of the assemblies could complete their full terms and were dismissed on the pretext of corruption and mal-governance. Since

the provision of reserved seats lapsed after the 1990 general election, none of the women could become part of democratically elected assemblies of Pakistan in 1990, 1993 and 1997 (Aurat Foundation, 2012), however, 2, 4 and 6 women were elected on general seats in the 1990, 1993 and 1997 general elections, respectively out of 217 general seats (Pildat, 2004).

In 1999, tensions between the military and the civilian government led to the overthrow of the democratic government of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif by the then army chief, General Pervez Musharraf. General Pervez Musharraf's ascendency to power was followed by the tragic event of 9/11. Since the incident was considered as an act of terrorism by Islamic extremists, Musharraf faced a mounting pressure from the international community to liberalize and de-radicalize the society. Musharraf's policy of 'enlightened moderation' was an attempt in this regard to ensure the international community a revision of the previous policies of Gen. Zia ul Haq (Khan & Naqvi, 2020) that supported Jihadist Islamists groups during the Soviet-Afghan war.

Women's empowerment became an integral part of Musharraf's moderation agenda, leading to an unprecedented increase in the number of reserved seats for women (LFO, 2002), in the lower house of parliament from 20 to 60. 17 % fixed quota for women was reserved in the Upper House of Parliament and 33 % in local bodies. The method of selection remained indirect through the political parties. The seats were allocated to the political parties in proportion to their seats in the legislature that were required to submit the names of their preferred female candidates to the election commission before the election (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973).

3. Methodology

This research employed the qualitative techniques of data collection, i.e. documentary analysis (Burnham et al., 2008; Denscombe, 2010) and elite interviewing (Beamer, 2002; Lilleker, 2003) to find the answers to the aforementioned questions. To examine women's participation in the legislative process - from the initiation of bills to the passage of the bills - particularly when it comes to the issues faced by women in society, this study relied on the documentary or archival sources in analysing the electoral data and reports retrieved from the website of the election commission of Pakistan. The research is further aided by Elite Interviewing to ascertain the situational and contextual knowledge (Mason,

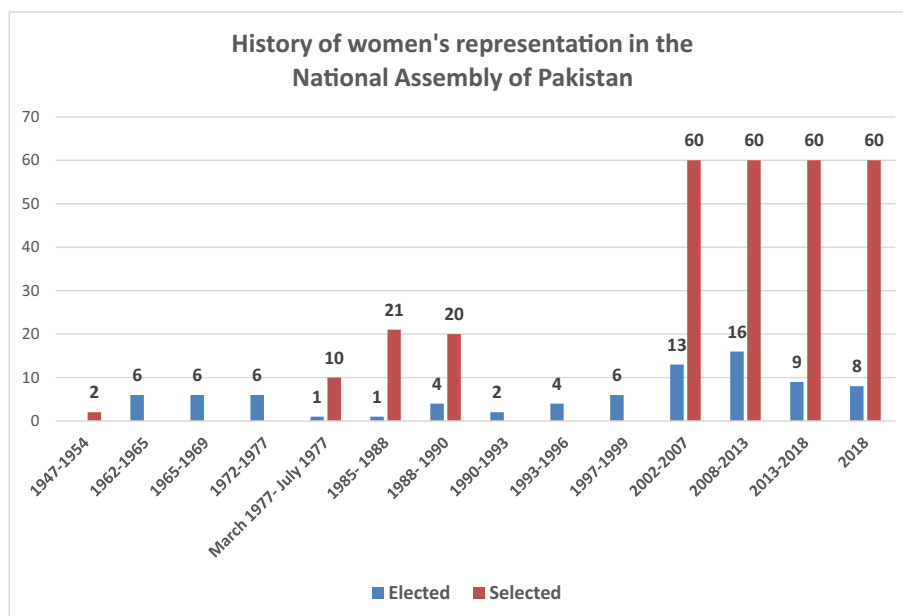


Fig. 1. Compiled and prepared by authors.

2002) from experts on the subject. Seventeen in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions, were conducted over the course of three months, from October 2019 to December 2019. The respondents were selected using the 'Purposive' and 'Snowball Sampling' techniques (Tongco, 2007) and can be classified into three groups: the first group includes 6 women's rights activists (both male and female), the second group comprises 9 parliamentarians (both male and female), and the third group consists of 2 experts in public policy (Table 2).

Keeping in view the ethical considerations, the interviewees were issued with a permission letter, duly signed by the relevant authorities of the university and the Department. The letter briefed the interviewees about the aims and objectives of the research prior to the interviews. They were also asked to sign a consent form to show their willingness for a face-to-face and audiotaped interviews. The interviews were conducted both in English and Urdu and lasted for approximately 40 to 60 min, which were later transcribed and translated. The interview data was then analysed using the inductive approach to data analysis. This analysis process starts with listening and transcribing the data to conduct the initial coding. This initial coding of the interview transcript was performed by undertaking line-by-line analysis of the transcripts to generate codes, using Nvivo software. The codes were then grouped into categories and sub-categories, based on similarity, which then helped in the development of the themes and over-arching topics. Examples of sub-categories, categories and over-arching topics are presented in Table 1 below.

The results drawn from the interviewees are presented in the form of the following three themes: patriarchal and misogynistic mindset, elitist and dynastic culture of political parties, and reserved seats: reinforcement of powerlessness?

4. Reserved seats for women: descriptive or substantive representation?

This section attempts to answer our first research question i.e., the extent to which an increased presence of women in parliament has resulted in a substantial representation of women in the Parliament. Substantive representation refers to the tangible steps that women have taken to empower womenfolk in Pakistan. Since the primary responsibility of parliamentarians is to pass laws, the substantive representation would be measured by the women specific legislations that are passed by women parliamentarians. The analysis is limited to 12th, 13th and 14th National Assemblies (2002–2018).

The 12th National Assembly of Pakistan passed two bills: The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2004 (on honour crimes) and The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2006 (Naqvi & Syed, 2015); both bills were government bills and were moved by the treasury benches. The 13th National Assembly (2008–2013) of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), however, remained the most active assembly in terms of reserved seats for women's participation and passed six bills. The protection against the Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 was moved by Ms. Asiya Nasir of JUI (F), who was selected on a reserved seat. The Bill aimed at protecting women from all types of harrasment in the workplace to ensure a safe working environment and demanded that public and private institutions adopted the code of conduct and a complaint procedure to redress the grievances of working

Table 2
Compiled by the authors (Aurat Foundation, 2013; Khan, 2018).

Women participation in general elections (2002–2018)				
	2002	2008	2013	2018
Political party platforms	37	41	61	105
Independent candidates	20	31	74	66
Total	57	72	135	171
Elected on General seats	13	16	9	08

Table 1
Themes From the Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Over-arching themes	Categories	(Codes) sub-categories
Patriarchal and Misogynistic Mindset	Gender essentialist beliefs and opinions about the role of women in society.	Male dominance.
	Systemic exclusion and segregation of women in the name of religion and culture. Unsupportive legal system.	Gendered stereotyped religious beliefs. Lack of freedom, especially in choosing life partner, in pursuing education and joining political parties. Reinforcement of gender stereotype views in curriculum. Conservative/traditional family norms. Social exclusion of women. Unsupportive laws and legal system. Violence against women. Honour killings.
Elitist and Dynastic Culture of Political Parties	Gender discriminatory practices in political parties.	Party culture deemed women inferior.
	Women not suitable for constituency politics. Elitist and dynastic politics.	Women not suitable for constituency politics in a traditional society like Pakistan. Lack of substantive representation in decision-making bodies of the political parties. Dynastic and family politics dominate.
Reserved Seats: Reinforcement of Powerlessness?	Elections require financial resources.	Politics for people with strong political and financial backgrounds.
	Economic dependency. Powerlessness attached with reserved seats parliamentarians.	Elections too expensive for common middle-class people, let alone women. Reserved seats an easy alternative. Selection not on merit.

women (Pildat, 2013). The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2010 (on sexual harassment) was moved by Sherry Rehman of the Pakistan People's Party, a reserved seat parliamentarian. The Act declared sexual harassment to be a punishable crime (Noreen & Musarrat, 2013).

The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill, 2011 was moved by Donya Aziz of PML (Q), selected on a reserved seat. The objective of the bill was 'to ensure women's property rights and to declare gender discriminatory practices, in many remote and backward areas of Pakistan, such as wani, swara and badla-e-sulha, and marriage with Quran, as punishable crimes' (Senate, 2011). The Women's Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2011 was moved by Mr. Syed Nayyer Hussain Bokhari of PPP. The purpose was to provide legal and financial assistance to women prisoners (Naqvi & Syed, 2015). The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2012 was moved by Ms. Yasmeen Rehman in National Assembly, who also joined parliament on a reserved seat. The Bill criminalized domestic violence and introduced one-year imprisonment and a fine of RS. 200,000 for the offence. Hence, five out of six bills were presented by women selected on reserved seats (Noreen & Musarrat, 2013).

The 14th National Assembly of Pakistan (2013–2018), presented three Bills related to women's empowerment. The Anti-Honour Killings Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2015 was moved by Senator Syeda Sughra Imam, selected on a reserved seat and Farhatullah Babar of the Pakistan People's Party. The Bill aimed to remove anomalies and loopholes in the existing laws to save women from becoming victims of honour killing in the name of socio-religious practices. The law specified that an individual found guilty of honour killing will be punished with life imprisonment, even if the family of the victim forgives the culprit (HRCP, 2017; Zaidi, 2016).

The Anti-Rape Bill, 2015 (Criminal Amendment Bill) was moved by Shaista Pervaiz/Senator Syeda Sughra Imam Malik, selected on reserved seats, and Farhatullah Babar. Rape is considered a very heinous crime in Pakistan and if proven guilty the perpetrator is either punished with a death sentence or ten to twenty-five years' imprisonment depending on the severity of the case. To improve the legislation further, the newly introduced anti-rape bill gives legal cover to the collection of DNA as a proof that rape is committed and also makes it mandatory on the court to take decision on such cases within three months. To facilitate women victims, it is not made compulsory for witness and the victim to be present for the trial; he/she can appear through audio or video means also. Furthermore, since social taboo is attached with rape victim, the publication of the name and any information regarding the victim was prohibited (Ashfaq, 2015; Dawn, 2015; Zaidi, 2016).

Another bill, the Hindu Marriage Act, 2015 was presented by Dr. Darshan and Ramesh Lal of PML (N) and PPP respectively. This law sets the minimum marriage age for girls at 18-years and suggests six months' imprisonment and a fine for its violation. The law also allows Hindu women to remarry six months after the death of their husband and to seek divorce on the grounds of bigamy and negligence (Act, 2017). Earlier, Hindu women had been denied these rights on religious basis. Two out of these three bills were presented by women on reserved seats.

An overview of the 12th, 13th and 14th National Assemblies highlights the proactive participation and close collaboration of women parliamentarians, selected on reserved seats, in initiating pro-women legislation, regardless of their party associations in the passage of women-specific legislation. For example, The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill, 2010 was jointly presented by Marvi Memon of PML (N) and Shahnaz WazirAli/Anusha Rehman of PPP – from the ruling and opposition parties respectively.

Nevertheless, the pro-active role of women parliamentarians failed to have any impact on the grass roots level, as the number of women who could win on general seats declined to 9 and 8 in the 14th (2013) and 15th (2018) National Assemblies of Pakistan respectively. Critics, however, argue that even the number of women elected on general seats in the 12th and 13th National Assemblies in Pakistan does not present a true reflection of women's representation in the Parliament, as the increase in the number of women who could be elected on general seats in the 12th assembly of Pakistan was an outcome of Musharraf's policy of making university graduation an eligibility criterion to contest the general elections. The restriction barred many male candidates from contesting the general election as they couldn't meet the criterion. The candidates who failed to meet the conditions set their educated women such as daughters, sisters and wives, forward to save their family constituency. For example, Hina Rabbani Khar, the ex. foreign minister of Pakistan, contested 2002 election because her father was unable to contest the election for not having a graduation degree (Dawn, 2012). The condition was introduced by President Musharraf in 2002 to bring more educated people to the Parliament (Afzal, 2013). Since dynastic or family politics is still a dominant feature of Pakistan's politics, the candidates who failed to meet the conditions put their women forward to save their family constituency. The condition of graduation for a contesting candidate remained intact in the 2008 general elections. On 21st April 2008, the Supreme Court of Pakistan abolished the graduation condition on the grounds that it was against the fundamental rights of citizens, as enshrined in the constitution of Pakistan (Iqbal, 2008). Consequently, the women who contested general seats to save their family's constituency were replaced by male family members, leading to a decline in their representation in the Parliament. Considering the decline in the number of women in constituency politics, the Election Commission of Pakistan passed the Election Act, 2017 and made it binding for all political parties to allocate at least 5 % of seats for women in the general elections (Election Act, 2017), leading to the highest number of women who participated in the 2018 general elections.

5. Women's political representation: challenges and the way forward

As discussed in the previous section, despite the presence of a substantive number of women parliamentarians, the steady decline in the number of women in general seats raises a number of questions regarding the usefulness of the affirmative measures – an increase in the number of reserved seats and a mandatory requirement on political parties to allocate at least 5 % of the seats for women in general elections. This section attempts to unveil the underlying causes behind this decline. The inductive qualitative content analysis of the interviews extracted three over-arching themes that helped in determining the underlying causes: patriarchal and misogynistic mindset, elitist and dynastic culture of political parties, and reserved seats: reinforcement of powerlessness.

5.1. Patriarchal and misogynistic mindset

In response to the questions, most of the respondents agreed that the primary reasons for women's exclusion from constituency politics is the patriarchal mindset and misogynistic tendencies embedded in the socio-cultural norms and the conservative interpretation of religion. It was emphasized that gender essentialism is not linked to illiteracy, as even the foreign qualified men resist women's presence in the public sphere, as highlighted by Irfan Mufti (Deputy Executive Director of South-Asia Partnership Pakistan), who is actively involved in addressing human rights issues in the rural areas of Pakistan:

“In Pakistan, a transition from an agrarian-traditional society to urban-modern society is quite visible, but the society has still not reconciled with the idea of an empowered woman. This has, resultantly, created a conflict in the situation, wherein women have been sensitized about their rights by the feminists, but men were kept aside. Men's exclusion from this transition resulted in violence and conflict in the society where on one hand women started to demand their rights, but men were not willing to surrender. He emphasized that engaging a perpetrator in dialogue is more important than sensitizing women about their rights,” (Personal interview, 2019).

Speaking in a similar vein, Umar Aftab, whose NGO Women's Empowerment Group works for the empowerment of women, contended the myth that gender bias or sexism is prevalent among those who are less educated or adhere to traditional socio-cultural values often rooted in religion. He debates that:

“Gender discrimination is not limited to a certain class, cultural, religious background and literacy level. There are examples of PhD scholars who have degrees from America but have a patriarchal mindset and consider women inferior. Sometimes, illiterate people give more respect to women; we cannot relate patriarchal mindset to educated or illiterate persons,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Summiya Yousaf (a women's rights activist associated with Democracy Reporting International), while acknowledging the prevalence of gender disparity as a social phenomenon, stressed the importance attached to homes in preserving or promoting the social construction of gender disparity:

“Home is a place where gender discriminatory and misogynistic practices are promoted and preserved, where a girl is treated differently as compared to a boy, and this discrimination continues throughout her life – from making choices about professions to choosing life partners,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Paradoxically, women themselves play a key role in the preservation and promotion of gender discriminatory practices as they have internalized the gender discriminatory socio-cultural norms and treat a girl differently to a male child. Here, the mother's role in challenging gender essentialist stereotypes was emphasized. Kiran Imran Dar, a member of

the National Assembly on a reserved seat (PML—N), further highlighted the non-supportive role of families towards working women: “Families do not support females when they work outside the home. Mothers' role is important in this regard, who should not only train their daughters, but also their sons,” (Personal Interview, 2019). Equal importance, however, was attached to ‘...sensitizing men and engaging them in a dialogue to redefine the narrative around women in Pakistan’.

When it comes to politics, the socially constructed narrative about gender essentialism transcends, leading to the social unacceptability of female politicians. Consequently, male politicians get preference over female politicians, as their chances of winning elections are considered far higher than a female candidate. The mandatory requirement of allocating at least 5 % of the seats to female party workers was of no respite, as just to meet the 5 % quota the women were offered tough seats where there was less chance for the party to win. As Nosheen Hamid highlighted: “In the July 2018 elections, tickets were given to women in those constituencies where there were less chances for the party to win. Strong seats were given to men,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

5.2. Elitist and dynastic culture of political parties

In Pakistan, the political parties are not structured on democratic principles as in other democracies. Resultantly, the leadership does not emerge from the grass root level through elections in the party; instead, the reins of political parties are passed on from father to son or daughter, with few exceptions. The dynastic culture of political parties accords tremendous discretion to party leaders in nominating members to the decision-making bodies of the parties and in the selection of candidates to contest elections. Subsequently, party decisions are taken, not on merit, but are motivated by the vested interests of a few at the top. The non-democratic political culture in the political parties that depends on the elite and feudal class for its survival, and is built on the exploitation of the underprivileged and powerless masses, further amplifies women's exclusion from mainstream politics. There was general consensus among the respondents that, in Pakistan, elections are all about money and power, and one has to be financially strong to contest the elections. Nosheen Hamid Miraj (PTI, MNA, on a reserved seat) stated, in line with Samina Khalid Ghurki (former MNA, on a PPPP ticket):

“Elections have become a huge money game and you need a lot of investment in it. Generally, women cannot invest money in the elections. The election commission should ensure the implementation of already existing election spending laws. When there will be a comparatively level playing ground for women, only then they will give better results,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Regarding the financial constraints, all the respondents agreed that they further restricted women's choices and made it harder for female parliamentarians to contest elections, and that it is manifested in the party's choices when it comes to ticket distribution. It was emphasized that parties generally give winnable party seats to male or female politicians with a strong financial and political background. The absence of women politicians from the decision-making bodies of the political parties is also considered evidence of gender imbalance in the political parties responsible for women's token representation in constituency politics, as highlighted by Summiya Yousaf (a women's activist who works for Democracy Reporting International):

“Decision-making powers in the political parties are in the hands of male members, and women are absent from party's central executive committees. Women are always considered second citizens and same culture is in political parties,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Nosheen Hamid, while supporting Summiya Yousaf, agrees that: “The representation of women in the decision-making bodies of political parties is very low,” (Personal Interview, 2019); however, there were doubts that a mere increase in the number would help without investing in the capacity building of female political workers to improve and

strengthen the skills needed to excel in politics. She emphasized:

“... capacity building and training of female politicians by the political parties is needed. Trained and enlightened women who understand their work well would definitely make a difference,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

5.3. Reserved seats: reinforcement of powerlessness

As discussed in the previous section, since the politics in Pakistan revolves around power and money, it makes it impossible for women from the lower strata of society to contest elections, adding to the disillusionment of female party workers who have neither power nor money. Here, the quota or reserved seats are used as a bargaining chip to silence female party workers. Female politicians accept this trade off as it ensures a safe route to parliament. Thus, the Women's Quota, which is meant to empower women, not only makes women passive, but is also used by the political parties to further perpetuate gender discriminatory practices. Mumtaz Mughal (a regional coordinator of Aurat Foundation) further highlights the powerlessness attached to the ‘quota women’, as she argues that women in reserved seats neither have strong constituency support behind them, nor do they receive developmental funds like women parliamentarians who get elected on a general seat, and argues that:

“Hameeda Waheed ud Din was the Minister for women's development. Since she came in parliament after contesting the election, nobody rejected her words because she had the power of the vote behind them. There is a need to change the criterion to elect female parliamentarians. Women who come in the parliament on reserved seats work under party pressure and are forced to follow party instructions. They neither receive developmental funds, nor sit in the forum like ticket holder women,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Generally referred to as ‘back benchers,’ as Nosheen Hamid Miraj pointed out, or ‘seat warmers,’ as was highlighted by Bushra Anjum, the reserved seats women are denied equal status to that of the men and the directly-elected women. Thus, the ‘reserved seats’, which were meant to ensure the active participation of women in parliament, further perpetuate gender discriminatory practices and reinforce powerlessness. Samina Khalid Ghurki, however, refutes the criticism levelled against political parties. She argues that women themselves do not take elections seriously and prefer to get selected on reserved seats:

“Political parties, as per election commission rules, allocate 5% seats to women in the general elections, but women do not contest elections seriously. Reserve seat is an attraction for women to enter into politics,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

To enhance women's representation, it is specified that political parties should introduce transparent and merit-based selection procedures to ensure that their female party workers are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, class or culture, and are not given ‘the most difficult seats’ only to meet the 5 % quota, as highlighted by Munaza Hassan. It is reiterated that political parties should not only take decisions on merit when it comes to ticket distribution, but also (as Naeema Kishwar pointed out), should actively support women in their election campaigns. She lamented the fact that neither central nor provincial party leaderships visit the constituencies where women contest. The parliamentarians Bushra Anjum, Munaza Hassan, M. Aslam and Naeema Kishwar, however, claim that the culture of political parties has started to change and political parties now select women on the basis of their being active and competent to deliver in parliament. Bushra Anjum reasons that:

“... change does not happen overnight. Our thinking pattern will change gradually and it is changing. PML (N) adopts a very clear-cut policy whilst selecting women on reserved seats, and gives

preference to female party workers and technocrats and those who have sufficient knowledge,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Uswah Aftab also supported Bushra Anjum's assertion by stressing that:

“Our party conducts interviews to select women, and their education is also given due consideration,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Muhammad Aslam likewise defends his party and emphasizes that in PTI:

“... the selection of women is carefully deliberated and they are scrutinized on the basis of their being active in the parliament, their problem-solving skills, and capability to take part in discussions in the Parliament,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

Naema Kishwar also defended her party and stated:

“When reserved seats were introduced in 2002, parties selected elite women, but this position gradually improved in 2008 and 2013 elections. Now, parties select those women who can deliver in the parliament and show better performance,” (Personal Interview, 2019).

The statistics, as discussed in the previous section, however, do not substantiate the claims made by the parliamentarians.

6. Analysis and discussion

This study examines the extent to which the descriptive representation of women in the 14th and 15th National Assembly of Pakistan translates into substantive representation for women. The analysis was undertaken at two levels. Firstly, it explores whether the presence of a large number of reserved seats, which parliamentarians helped initiate, and the passage of laws against gender discriminatory practices, are prevalent in society. Secondly, it studies the extent to which their presence in parliament creates a favorable environment for women's active participation in constituency politics.

In response to the first question, this study finds a positive correlation between women's descriptive and substantive representation - as an increase in the number of women parliamentarians through reserved seats resulted in the passage of laws against gender discriminatory practices. During this period (2008–2018), women parliamentarians' proactive participation, regardless of their party affiliation, resulted in the passages of eleven bills that included the Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), and the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act (2012). The findings substantiate the assumptions of critical mass theory, that numerical strength, even if it is still in the minority, affects the policies and legislations with regards to ‘women's empowerment’ (Dahlerup, 1988; Childs & Krook, 2008; Beckwith, 2007;

Childs & Krook, 2009).

The affirmative action, it was further theorized, would help in changing the gender essentialist perception of women in societies where politics is still considered to be a masculine field (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007). Nonetheless, this study highlights that in Pakistan, while the affirmative action has contributed positively in the passage of laws to protect women's rights, it has failed to bring any positive change in the gender essentialist perception of women. The respondents attributed the widening gender disparity in constituency politics to the authoritarian, elitist as also highlighted by Adeney (2017) and dynastic political culture in Pakistan, which accords tremendous discretion to party leaders who enjoy unchallenged powers in the selection and nomination of the candidates. Since the political parties control the recruitment process of the quota of women (Lacko, 2013), even the reserved seats are reserved, in most cases, for women from an influential political and financial background. Thus, despite the fact that with a significant increase in the number of women who emerged from a few token individuals into a considerable minority (or ‘critical mass’), the representative claims of women parliamentarians are questioned. The article concludes by highlighting that to ensure a fair representation of women in politics, the role of mothers in challenging the gender essentialist stereotypes in homes, and the importance of ‘sensitizing men and engaging them in a dialogue to redefine the narrative around women in Pakistan’ is pre-requisite. Equally important, however, is the restructuring of political parties along democratic lines by promoting meritocracy and transparency in the selection process, as well as by providing financial support to female members to run election campaigns.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, this research finds a positive correlation between an increase in the number of women legislators and the passage of legislation with regards to women's empowerment and gender discriminatory practices. Nevertheless, it is argued that the affirmative action has failed to have any impact on constituency politics for female workers, who are still discriminated against and marginalized. It is contended that the Quota has become an instrument in the hands of political parties to further disempower women, by denying them general winnable seats and by silencing them by offering them a ‘reserved seat’. This article concludes by highlighting a proactive role of mothers in homes, in challenging gender discriminatory practices, and the importance of sensitizing men and engaging them in a dialogue to redefine the narrative around women in Pakistan. It is also proposed that the political parties need to incorporate structural changes along democratic norms to reduce gender disparity.

Appendix A. List of Parliamentarians

Interviewee	Interview date	Affiliation	Designation	Elected/ Selected	Achievements
Samina Khalid Ghurki	3–10-2018	Pakistan People's Party	Ex. MNA	General Seat	Federal Minister for National Integration, Heritage & Social Welfare, and Special Education. She was elected MNA in 2002 and in 2008. Currently serving as President of PPP Punjab women's wing.
Munaza Hassan	5-10-2018	Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf	MNA	Reserve Seat	She was selected as MNA in 2013 and 2018 general elections and served as President of PTI women's wing.
Nausheen Hamid Miraj	6-10-2018	Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf	MNA	Reserve Seat	Selected MNA from Lahore in 2018 election. Previously, she was the reserve seat member of Punjab Assembly in 2013. Currently, she is working as parliamentary secretary of National Health Services, regulations and coordination.
Naeema Kishwar Khan	5-10-2018	Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F)	Ex. MNA	Reserve Seat	She was the reserve seat in 2013. She was also selected a member of the Provincial Assembly from KPK in 2010.
Kiran Imran Dar	8-10-2018	Pakistan Muslim League (N)	MNA	Reserve Seat	She was selected as MNA in 2015 and in 2018. She served as a member of Punjab Assembly in 2008 and 2013.
Bushra Anjum Butt	10-10-2018	Pakistan Muslim League (N)	MPA	Reserve Seat	She was selected as a member of Punjab Assembly for two terms in 2013 and 2018. She is also the member for Education, Youth Affairs, Tourism and Archeology departments.

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Interviewee	Interview date	Affiliation	Designation	Elected/ Selected	Achievements
Mohammad Aslam Khan	10-10-2018	Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf	MNA	–	Elected member of National Assembly from constituency NA-254 Karachi Central II in 2018.
Rohale Asghar	10-10-2018	Pakistan Muslim League (N)	MNA	–	He was elected as a MNA three times in 1985, 2008 and 2018. Prior to that, he served as a member of the Punjab Assembly.
Uswah Aftab	12-10-2018	Pakistan Muslim League (N)	MPA	Reserve Seat	She was selected for the first time as a member of Punjab Provincial Assembly in 2018.

Appendix B. List of women's rights activists

Interviewee	Interview date	NGO	Designation	
Mumtaz Mughal	6-2-2018	Aurat Foundation	Resident Director	His organization is committed to creating awareness for a democratic society in Pakistan where men and women have equal rights.
Irfan Mufti	6-3-2018	South-Asia Partnership Pakistan	Deputy Executive Director	His organization is actively involved in rural areas of Pakistan to address human rights issues.
Bushra Khaliq	2-2-2018	Women in the Struggle for Empowerment	Executive Director	The organization is aimed at protecting women's rights in Pakistan to make society violence-free, where human beings enjoy equal rights.
Omer Aftab	30-1-2018	Women's Empowerment Group	CEO	His NGO is aimed at mindset development of women and children in Pakistan. He is also a country Director of the White Ribbon campaign, Pakistan and the National Coordinator of Pink Ribbon Pakistan.
Summiya Yousaf	23-2-2018	Democracy Reporting International	Women's activist	This NGO is working to ensure the effective implementation of Pakistan's international labour and human rights commitments.
Iram Fatima	23-2-2018	Bedari	Women's activist	This NGO aims to promote equal rights for women.

Appendix C. Academic scholars

Academic Experts on Gender

Interviewee	Interview date	Affiliation	Department	Designation
Dr. Ambreen Salahuddin	1-1-2018	Academia	Gender Studies	Assistant Professor
Iram Rasheed	3-1-2018	Academia	Gender Studies	Lecturer

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